

Promoting a Big Canada: The Scientific Arguments

BY MADELINE WELD, TIMOTHY MURRAY, AND DAVID SCHINDLER

We are grateful to the editors of *The Social Contract* for devoting this issue entirely to Canada, with articles selected by a trio of Canadian scientists or activists, and also to Stuart Hurlbert, who planted the idea of a *TSC-Canada* issue in all of our heads—Canuck “guest editors” and *TSC* editors—in the first place. The articles in this issue show that the topic of population growth in Canada has parallels to the situation in the U.S. and, for that matter, in Australia and Britain. They describe how, contrary to popular mythology, neither the resources nor carrying capacity of Canada are “infinite,” that it suffers from urban sprawl, loss of prime farmland, ecological devastation and biodiversity loss, high greenhouse gas emissions, an economic ideology of perpetual growth, and a policy of mass immigration that is supposedly going to alleviate labor shortages and the problem of an aging population but in fact serves political and corporate interests.

It is usually assumed that Canada has a copious supply of freshwater compared to other countries, but closer examination shows this to be fallacious. The true measure of sustainable water supply is annual runoff. In this respect, Canadian runoff is almost the same per unit area as in the U.S. and China, where water is generally regarded as scarce. As in the U.S., the rainshadow of the Rocky Mountains is a particularly dry area, an “empire of dust” that yields no net runoff.

Canada’s Indigenous peoples present another problem. They have not been conquered as in some other countries, but have entered into land-sharing treaties with white Europeans in the late nineteenth and early twentieth cen-

turies. These treaty rights are guaranteed in the Canadian Constitution. They guarantee that the land will support Indigenous peoples as they always have, via a hunter-gatherer lifestyle. For this subsistence lifestyle to be effective in an unproductive northern climate, there cannot be large-scale urban and industrial development. Already, fish, caribou, furbearers and other organisms essential to traditional lifestyles are in decline in many areas.

As Canada hurtles headlong into growth and more growth, some pundits are calling for a population of 100 million that they say would give Canada more clout (one wonders if they have insecurities about their manhood). Others argue that we have an ageing population, which needs an influx of young immigrants to support it. These are fallacious arguments. Studies have shown that immigrants change the age structure of the Canadian population only infinitesimally. It is forgotten that current Canadians are as healthy at 75 as their grandfathers were at 55, and many prefer to keep working past traditional retirement ages. Increased mechanization and slight adjustments to working hours are other options.

The question arises whether there might be any scientific arguments to be made about growing Canada’s population. It is of course politicians (and their corporate masters) who are leading the charge for growth, but have scientists weighed in?

In fact, they have. Scientists have given their opinions on several occasions, and (here’s a surprise!) government has completely ignored their advice.

There are of course no scientific arguments that would support growing Canada’s population! There is no serious scientist in Canada who has promoted a larger population for Canada. In fact, the scientific advice to the government has consistently been exactly the opposite.

In 1976, the Science Council of Canada produced Report No. 25, titled *Population, Technology and Resources*, whose authors, in their introductory letter to the Honourable C.M. Drury, Minister of State for Science and Technology, write:

The Report draws attention to the way a rapidly growing population would exacerbate the stresses caused by existing patterns of production and consumption. It notes the probability of greatly increased pressures on Canada’s ur-

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ban areas, transportation systems and related social and political institutions. Uncertainty about the extent of non-renewable—especially energy—resources is noted, and the potentially adverse effects of climatic fluctuation on Canada’s renewable resource base [are] considered.

The 1976 report looked at population growth in Canada, understood that improved living standards meant increased per capita consumption, and considered the changing demographics in Canada and the world. It addressed the fact that Canada cannot possibly solve the world overpopulation problem with an immigration policy, and looked at the conflict over land that would arise between agricultural use and development, the problem of future energy supplies, and the fact that Canada has always been among the most energy-intensive countries in the world. The report was very clear about the fact that Canada’s resources were not only finite but under pressure.

In 1991, the Intelligence Advisory Committee with input from Environment Canada, the Defence Department, and External Affairs, produced a confidential document for the Privy Council, titled *The Environment: Marriage Between Earth and Mankind*. The report states that:

Controlling population growth is crucial to addressing most environmental problems, including global warming. For naturally occurring restraints to effect population control would mean acceptance of famine, disease, lower living standards, unemployment, political instability and environmental destruction. Increasing industrial development and consumption increases energy demands and leads to air and water pollution. The international community has only just begun to seriously discuss this issue. Although some progress has been made to slow the rate of growth, the increase grows larger each year.

It also says that:

Population growth is an underlying cause of much of the pressure placed on the environment. The heavily inhabited flood plains, especially the Granges-Brahmaputra (sic) in Bangladesh, and the Nile in Egypt, are especially vulnerable. Any mass movement of environmental refugees would further strain world health and relief organizations.

Unfortunately, the information did not prod the Canadian government into increasing its support for international family planning.

With respect to Canada, the report says that:

It is, because of its harsh climate and long distances, the most energy-intensive of the free-market industrialized nations. Canada is en-

dowed with vast water resources, but with 90 percent of its population concentrated within a band up to 100 miles of the USA border, water resources in these areas are already being utilized to their fullest. Polluted water has become an everyday concern. Although Canada’s population is not large in world terms, its concentration in various areas has already put stress upon regional environments in many ways. Canada can expect to have increasing numbers of environmental refugees requesting immigration to Canada, while regional movements of the population at home, as from idle fishing areas, will add further to population stresses within the country.

The Intelligence Advisory Committee report was of course completely ignored by the Canadian government. In fact, it was Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, under whose government the report was produced, who launched what could be called Canada’s policy of mass immigration, taking in at least a quarter of a million people each year and often more. Mulroney was acting out of pure political self-interest on the advice of his immigration minister Barbara McDougall, who pointed out that most of the immigrant and ethnic vote was going to the Liberal Party, because Mulroney’s Liberal predecessor, Pierre Trudeau, had opened immigration, theretofore primarily from Europe and Australia, to the world. However, under Trudeau, as had always been the case, total intake was a “tap-on, tap-off” affair,



based on perceived economic needs. Starting in 1991, Mulroney’s Progressive Conservative government (whose party is now known as the Conservative Party) opened the floodgates, and every prime minister since then, regardless of political party, has kept them open. Immigration (meaning mass immigration), multiculturalism, and “diversity” as a sacred dogma were promoted by political and economic leaders and by most of the mainstream media, not least by the government-run Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

In 1997, the results of a study on the Fraser River Basin of British Columbia led by Michael Healey of the University of British Columbia (Vancouver, B.C.) were published. The C \$2.4 million Fraser Basin Ecosystem Study concluded that the rapidly growing urban environment would overwhelm the natural resource base. As indicators of serious environmental decline the report noted

high nitrogen pollution in groundwaters and the presence of visible abnormalities in more than 90 percent of the fish samples taken from the Fraser River. As many as 50 streams in the greater Vancouver area that had once supported runs of Pacific salmon had been turned into storm sewers. Many of the remaining streams were being degraded because of pollution from automobiles, agriculture, and other sources. At the time, the population level in the area was considered three times above the sustainable level. When the report was released, principal investigator Michael Healey said, “The lower Fraser basin exemplifies all the social, environmental, and economic problems of modern industrial nations. These problems are not going away and it is high time that we faced up to them.” Of course, we have done no such thing. Vancouver is Canada’s second largest city and one of its most rapidly growing cities. There is no reason to think that the problems outlined in the Healey report have vanished or indeed have not become even worse. Yet a few years ago, when Tim Murray and a co-activist brought the concerns raised in the report to the attention of former Vancouver mayor and current Liberal Senator Larry Campbell, they were informed that it was out of date.

Proponents of rapid population increase always flout the number of jobs that must be filled if the economy is to “boom.” They fail to mention that the burgeoning population also has a cost. A rapidly increasing population needs more subdivisions, doctors, hospitals, teachers, schools, universities, better roads, and other infrastructure. Building these competes directly with booming industry for materials and people. The result is high inflation. For an excellent example, look at what has happened to construction costs in Alberta in the past decade. By the time infrastructure costs are paid, we usually have more people, more traffic, more suburban sprawl, more air pollution, but no greater wealth per capita. The profits from a boom go into few pockets. A recent study by the University of Alberta’s Parkland Institute showed that in the last 30 years, the top 1 percent of income earners in Alberta doubled their waters with average increases of income of \$320,000. However, the bottom 90 percent had average increases of only \$3,900.

The heads of Canada’s political and economic lead-

ers remain firmly stuck in the sand. But, sadly, they are not alone. While the scientific evidence mounts that population and economic growth are driving the resource depletion of the planet, and that resource depletion is the very reason that economic recovery from the “great recession” of 2008 is proving elusive, our political leaders still see more economic growth as the solution. The madcap immigration policy that Canada has been pursuing for over two decades is justified with economic arguments—albeit flawed economic arguments based on false premises. Meanwhile, environmental organizations remain silent on the environmental impact of immigration-driven population growth—

even as they ask for money to mitigate the impact of that growth. And scientific organizations? Apparently they too have been beaten by the big stick of political correctness. As described in an earlier issue of *TSC* (Schindler, Weld, & Hurlbert, *TSC* 22(2): 11 — 25), the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) believes in the Advancement of Silence when it comes to talking about population growth in the U.S. or Canada. At their 2012 annual meeting in Vancouver (the first time the meeting was held in Canada in over 30 years), they shut out first Californians for Population Stabilization (CAPS), then Population Institute Canada (PIC), from having a booth on flimsy pretexts but for which the real reason was clearly trepidation at connecting environmental problems with population growth that is driven by immigration.

After a presentation on population growth in Canada that Madeline Weld gave in Portland, Oregon, last August at the meeting of the Ecological Society of America, a CAPS board member told her, “You have shattered my illusions about Canada.” We suspect that this issue of *TSC* will also shatter many people’s illusions about Canada—and that would be a good thing. Canada and the U.S. don’t just share the world’s longest undefended border (albeit an increasing source of worry)—we share many of the same problems with the same underlying causes. But we won’t find solutions if we deny that there is a problem in the first place. This issue of *The Social Contract* should make it clear to anyone who reads even one article that when it comes to population growth, there is indeed a problem in Canada. ■



Brian Mulroney
Former Canadian Prime Minister